



GLOBALIZATION AND EDUCATION AID POLICY DISCOURSE: AN ANALYSIS OF ASIAN DONORS' POLICY DISCOURSE FOR CAMBODIAN ASSISTANCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explain the formulation of education policy discourse of bilateral aid agencies in Japan, South Korea, and China to examine theories of globalization of education with Cambodia as a case study. A further effort was made to explore the potential of post-structural theory to examine processes of globalization in terms of policy convergence or divergence in relation to the two dominant sociological theories in the field of comparative education: Neo-Institutional Theory and Systems Theory. Policy documents and interviews with government officials were analyzed to test these two theories against a post-structural approach. It was found that Asian aid agencies display tendencies toward both convergence and divergence in their aid policy discourse. There is a tendency for the agencies to practice self-referentiality in an effort to strengthen their political influence in international relations. Further research will be required to examine how project implementation may confirm or challenge the interpretation of the aid policy discourse in relation to post-structural discourse analysis.

KEYWORDS: Cambodia, aid, politics, donor agencies, discourse analysis.

INTRODUCTION:

How do emerging donors differ in both their approaches to providing aid to education in a developing nation and the discourse which is used to describe those initiatives? This question is tied into related debates about new modalities for how aid and investment are made to developing nations from emerging donors, and how these modalities may or may not redefine the global development project. These questions have guided the research to investigate the approaches of several bilateral aid agencies in East Asia and the discourse those agencies have utilized related to the creation of new aid modalities. In this project, I have tried to examine this discourse as it relates to both structural-functionalist and post-structuralist theories of globalization of education as they might explain the aid discourse of bilateral aid agencies in Asia (Japan, South Korea, and China) in relation to their development policies in the particular development context of Cambodia. These theories are at the center of recent debates in comparative education about which sociological theories can best describe the globalization trends and potential future directions of global aid policies and practices. Until this time they have largely been applied to case studies of education policies and projects transferred from one nation to another. This study seeks to apply the theories to explaining the political discourse of donor nations in one specific recipient nation: Cambodia. In doing an attempt has been made to determine whether structural-functionalist or post-structuralist theories are more apt in trying to explain the new modalities and discourse for aid and national development.

Much research has sought to establish that bilateral aid agencies act independently to establish their own aid modalities particularly in regard to who receives that aid (Alesina & Dollar, 2000). In addition, there have been a number of studies done on the role of international organizations such as UNESCO and the World Bank for the promotion of Education for All globally (Mundy, 1999; Heyneman, 2003). Other studies have addressed the role of multilateral agencies in Cambodia such as the World Bank and UNICEF (Hattori 2009) and UNESCO (Dy & Ninomiya 2003) in Cambodia. Some researchers have examined the bilateral aid of Japan (Kamibepu 2002, King and McGrath 2002) or China (Gillespie 2002) for education on a global scale. The researcher's previous JSPS Research Grant focused on the role of Japan, South Korea, and China in the development of education in Cambodia. This study will expand on that study to compare the aid discourse of these "emerging donors" in Asia. This study will situate the research on Asian bilateral aid institutions' approach to aid policy within the central debate about globalization of education in the fields of educational sociology and comparative education today. On the one hand, Neo-Institutionalist scholars contend that a "world culture" represented by international organizations promotes convergence of common values of "progress" and "justice" to expand education in nations across the globe (Meyer & Rowan: 1977). Neo-institutionalists would expect bilateral aid agencies in different countries to use similar or convergent discourse in describing how they give aid to developing nations. On the other hand, Systems Theorists would argue that the "policy talk" of education policy exists as discourse which adheres to the self-referentiality hypothesis as described by Schriewer in his expansion on the theories of Luhmann (Schriewer, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Systems theorists would expect that different bilateral aid agencies in different nations will develop their own unique discourse separate from the discourse of other bilateral aid agencies in other nations. There is room to suggest that other post-structural theories within sociology or other academic disciplines may be more promising in their potential to explain the

development of bilateral aid discourse in the policy canon of various bilateral aid agencies.

Previous studies led by Neo-Institutionalist researchers have examined the presence of ministries of education around the world as evidence of institutional isomorphism (i.e., convergence). Other studies have focused on the role that international organizations play in the process of globalization and convergence of world culture (Chabbot, 2009). However, there have not been any comparative studies of the policy discourse of donor nations in relation to a single nation. There is also much promise in applying a post-structural approach to this discourse analysis based on the theory of "Mythologies" established by Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1957). It might be inaccurate to characterize this theory from Barthes as post-structural as the does not make a clean break from the critical theory tradition. Barthes' idea is that discourse is formed with both sign and signifier to explain the appeal of those policies. Barthes explained this theory with the analogy to a curriculum example for learning Latin. In the example, a sentence about a lion is written to teach students a grammatical rule in Latin. Thus, in that example the "signifier" is the lion which carries the sign of knowledge, in this case of Latin grammar. This example can be applied to policy discourse of Chinese aid. The task is to analyze terms like "mutual benefit" and "win-win cooperation" to evaluate how they appeal to the aid recipient and "signify" friendly relations while in effect creating new aid modalities which may benefit the donor nation more directly. Such a discussion must be left for a later time when the actual effectiveness of such projects can be evaluated to ascertain the balance of benefit. Cambodia presents an interesting case as a result of its unique history since the Khmer Rouge Genocide and the rapid influx of aid agencies into the country following the Paris Peace Agreement of 1991. In the three decades since that time several different nations have held the mantle of top donor which has had significant effects on the volume and types of aid given to the Cambodian nation. In the current landscape where China holds such a pre-eminent role, it is important to examine the degree to which Asian bilateral aid agencies may have converged or diverged in their response to this shift and how that portends for explaining these trends by using leading theories in sociology of education. This comparison will focus on the governments and bilateral aid agencies of three nations in Asia (Japan, South Korea, China) in order to broaden the examination of globalization and aid discourse with Cambodia as a case study.

METHODS:

The purpose of this study is to examine a greater question at the center of the current debate in the fields of educational sociology and comparative education as reflected in the research question below. The research question which guides this study is stated as, "Do government institutions in Asia converge or diverge in their aid discourse toward Cambodia and how do we explain that discourse formation?" Several questions must be addressed to approach this topic. Do Asian institutions converge with Western institutions toward aid policy? Are Asian institutions creating a new "Asian modality" for aid policy toward developing nations? Is each Asian nation creating its own unique aid policy discourse in developing nations? The study will seek to reveal the following: the influence of global and local forces on the creation of aid policy, the degree of policy consensus between Asian donors, and in what ways emerging bilateral aid agencies converge or diverge with this consensus.

This study will focus on two levels: the theory debate on globalization of education aid policy and a discourse analysis of the aid policy statements of three Asian nations. During the first stage the researcher examined the current state of the theoretical debate in comparative education about globalization of policy discourse as well as post-structuralist theories which may apply to a policy discourse analysis. During the second stage the researcher examined the policy documents of the bilateral aid institutions with particular attention to the discourse created within those documents. The researcher collected first and second-hand resources to describe the aid orientation of the bilateral agencies. Furthermore, the researcher conducted extensive interviews with officials from the aid agencies and analyzed those interviews as further examples of policy discourse formulation. The policy documents and interviews were subjected first to a policy discourse analysis according to the principles laid out in Bardach (2008). This policy analysis focused on the policy as it was dictated by donors' in their policy formulation as reflected in aid policy documents. The researcher subjected the policy documents to further analysis to discuss the policies as they exhibit convergence or divergence of policy priorities versus potential new forms of discourse formation. The researcher analyzed all policy documents according to the following process. A comprehensive conceptually-clustered data matrix was used to compile and organize data as themes emerged (Miles & Huberman 1994). "Data reduction" was performed to identify emerging themes and "constant comparison" was used to check the validity of those themes (Marshall & Rossman 1989; Lecompte & Preissle 1993). Thereby, a theoretical framework can be chosen to describe the findings per "theory implications selection" (Lecompte & Preissle 1993). As such, the discourse was deconstructed as it relates to the positions taken by bilateral aid agencies and how we can explain the discourses by comparing those discourses from the three separate nations. In doing so, some attention must also be paid to the formation of the bilateral aid agencies themselves to examine the institutionalization of these structures and the effect they might have on the formation of policy discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

As mentioned previously Neo-institutionalist studies have pointed to the creation of similar institutions such as ministries of education as proof of the convergence of institution-building in nations around the world. Similarly, according to this approach, one might expect the bilateral aid agencies to undergo similar institutionalization. On the surface the creation of KOICA in Korea is very similar to that of JICA in both name and structure at multiple levels of the two agencies which would indicate convergence. Korean officials recognize these similarities in stating that "KOICA is obviously modeled after JICA from the establishment" (KOICA Official, 2019). Japanese officials also perceived similarities in approaches to aid and stated those similarities in interviews:

"KOICA is really similar to JICA. Overall KOICA seems very similar, the way that it provides support, the way it focuses on the same sectors such as science and math education and technical education" (JICA Official, 2019)

However, this study seeks to examine the discourse as a more indicative sign of true degrees of convergence, divergence, or some other trends.

Both Japanese and Korean officials practiced a great deal of self-referentiality in both describing their approaches in terms of policy and practice. Japanese officials referred to "Japan's approach" and "good models" from Japan (JICA Official, 2019). Korea officials also talked about the "Korean development experience" as more "valid models" for developing nations than those from Western countries. At the same time it is important to note that Korean officials also saw shifts from the "traditional KOICA approach" to new approaches which indicates that it is difficult to characterize a nation's approach in monolithic terms (KOICA Official, 2019).

China and its Ministry of Commerce have shown very divergent modalities in relation to its aid approach to Cambodia. This is particularly evident in the Chinese White Paper on ODA of 2011. Much of the discourse in this policy paper shares similar themes in using terms like "*friendship*", "*mutual benefit*", and "*win-win cooperation*". These themes belie the Chinese approach in describing how China's approach to development obfuscates the division between development aid and investment and challenges more traditional modalities. While Chinese officials have been more reticent to explain their approach, it is helpful to compare the impressions which this approach makes on Japanese and Korean officials.

Japanese officials heard from their Cambodian counterparts that Chinese officials did things very differently in both the speed of project implementation and the lack of conditionalities. Japanese officials were also concerned about the lack of transparency on the part of China, in that there was not much effort toward donor coordination or participation in sector-wide approaches to planning (SWAPs). At the policy discourse level the difficulty lies in separating "*policy talk*" from "*policy action*". It may be beyond the scope of this paper, but an important task for the future is to examine how much the Chinese aid projects actually match the discourse about "*win-win cooperation*". In more basic terms it is important to ascertain who is benefiting most and whether all parties perceive these projects to be beneficial or exploitative.

CONCLUSION:

The data from this study presents some interesting ways to compare the aid discourse in relation to the various theoretical orientations for interpretation. It is clear that the formation of basic structures of bilateral aid agencies may show some signs of convergence in the way that some emerging donors like Korea model their agency in the form of KOICA on previous examples such as Japan's JICA. These similarities are not so surprising in particular when one considers the history of Japan's colonization of Korea and strong imprint left on the political and economic institutions of Korea. Nevertheless, once we delve into the perceptions of policy between the nations based both on policy document analysis and interviews it becomes clear that there are more significant ways in which the nations try to establish difference.

It is not surprising that nations would attempt to establish difference between their aid approaches because these nations compete for influence in a newly emergent market like Cambodia. To some degree, they must establish that they have a unique and superior development model to offer to Cambodia in comparison to their competitors. Therefore, it is not surprising that Japanese officials refer to "*Japan's approach*" and Korean officials refer to the "*Korean development experience*". This self-referentiality clearly supports divergence as would be argued by systems theorists. However, the comparison with China proves to be more difficult. This is perhaps because China seems to have created a new aid modality or its own unique approach to the donor-recipient relationship. The greater challenge is to unpack the discourse of China's approach to see whether it is truly creating new modalities or simply re-packaging old modalities using new signifiers. The theory of "*mythologies*" would support the creation of these new signifiers such as "*friendship*" in an attempt by a donor to make its approach more appealing. In moving from a comparison of policy discourse it is the hope of this researcher to evaluate the policies and projects of the three donors to be able to judge more accurately the true degrees of convergence and divergence and, furthermore, explore the potential for new theories to explain the process of policy discourse formulation as it relates to globalization of education.

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